

ADOLPH OBERTH Interview
by Bruce Pierini
Sacramento Ethnic Communities Survey Project
January 25, 1984

| <u>Time</u> | <u>Topic</u> |
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| 0:00 | Introduction |
| 0:35 | Personal background. Born and raised in Transylvania which is present day Rumania. There was a large German settlement in Transylvania into which he was born. |
| 1:35 | Adolph talks about his higher education: Doctor in Natural Sciences is his highest degree. This is equivalent to our Ph.D. His thesis was on the <u>Mechanism of Sensitization on Photographic Emulsions</u> . |
| 2:24 | He describes his father Hermann Oberth and his father's work as a prominent German rocket scientist. Hermann Oberth went to Germany in 1938. He ended up working with Dr. Werner Von Braun at Pinnemünde. |
| 4:28 | His assessment of his father's life on Adolph himself and his own career goals. |
| 5:12 | Description of how Adolph came to the United States. Emigration factors influencing his decision during the period 1953-1955 were: 1) he wanted to see the World, 2) his parents were at Huntsville, Alabama and 3) he wanted valuable foreign experience. |
| 8:11 | Background of how he got to emigrate here with a visa when quotas were enforced and there was a ten-year waiting list. |
| 9:05 | Dupont helped him get here. |
| 9:48 | Dupont Company offered him a job in New Jersey in their photographic department. |
| 11:00 | He had a special emigration status: "Alien Whose Services Were Urgently Needed In the United States." |

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| 12:48 | Adolph, his wife and infant son arrived in New York Harbor on January 16, 1956 and were met by a representative of DuPont Corporation. |
| 13:38 | Adolph's competency in English upon arrival. |
| 14:05 | Greatest problem was his pronunciation and learning to get accustomed to American speech patterns. |
| 17:00 | He learns more English but came here with a relatively large vocabulary. |
| 18:24 | Television helped him and his wife learn English in 1955 when they first arrived. |
| 19:38 | He used to watch the television show "Wyatt Earp" and other westerns, detective shows and comedies such as Burns and Allen. |
| 20:38 | The languages spoken in Transylvania at the time he was there in the early 1930s were Romanian and Hungarian. The Germans there spoke German. |
| 21:23 | He left Transylvania when he was about nine years old with a small amount of Romanian and Hungarian picked up from servants and in primary school. |
| 22:55 | He came to Germany before he was in the third grade and so did not pick up much of the Romanian and Hungarian languages. |
| 23:20 | Adolph comes to Aerojet in Sacramento from DuPont in New Jersey in April of 1959. |
| 24:00 | His alien status was not an impediment to work on the rocket technology section of Aerojet. |
| 25:40 | He explains why he thinks Aerojet did not mind his alien status. |
| 26:55 | Describes contacts which alerted him to the job at Aerojet in 1959. |

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| 28:16 | He describes his work at Aerojet. |
| 29:19 | Describes the decline of the Aerospace Industry ca. 1964. Government funding became much scarcer. |
| END Side A. | |
| 0:15 | Describes how the mid-1960s decline affected his job and Aerojet. Aerojet shrank from a high of 22,000 workers to about 2,000. |
| 1:50 | Describes national aerospace policy changes. |
| 2:08 | Describes why he didn't lose his job during the cutbacks. He was able to secure his own contract from the government, particularly the Air Force. |
| 2:42 | His job title before 1982 was "Scientist." It is presently "Consultant." He has a 200-day-a-year minimum contract with Aerojet. |
| 3:28 | Describes the social circle of German chemists and engineers at Aerojet. |
| 4:30 | Two Austrian families who had lived in Argentina were part of this circle. Two others were chemists. They had all survived the loss of Germany and the war. Five of the seven or eight families were roughly the same age. |
| 6:55 | There were differences among German-speaking friends in terms of speech. |
| 8:50 | Description of the general origins and growth of Aerojet at the end of World War II. Founded by an Hungarian who had immigrated much earlier in the century. |
| 13:59 | Description of memories of Second World War. There was an advance in the type of work done in the U.S. in the rocket sector compared to late World War II Germany. V-2 rocket in Germany compared to two-stage V-2 rocket here. By early 1950s liquid rocket engines had developed in Huntsville, Alabama. |

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| 16:33 | Description of the change from working under the National Socialist Government's Rocket Program and the U.S. space and defense industries. |
| 17:45 | Description of working under the World War II Nazi regime. |
| 18:25 | Adolph Oberth's work as a <u>Lufftwaffenhilfer</u> or anti-aircraft helper in a battery around a synthetic gasoline plant near Pinnemünde. There were an average number of two to three air raids per month. |
| 20:00 | The night raids were British, day raids were American. |
| 20:28 | Description of a typical day on an anti-aircraft battery. |
| 22:25 | Moving description of some of the horrors of total war. |
| 24:00 | Description of the bombing of Nuremberg. |
| 26:00 | Description of the numbing effects of seeing the horrors of war year after year. |
| 30:00 | END |